

Running Head: CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY



**A study of factors consumers experience as important when evaluating and responding
towards CSR initiatives**

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Abstract

This research paper has investigated what parameters consumers experience as important when evaluating the CSR initiatives that organizations have, as well as how engaged they are in socially responsible organizations. The paper also looked at how critical the consumers are towards the CSR initiatives that organizations have implemented.

Through 10 in- depth unsymmetrical interviews it was indicated that although consumers respond positively to CSR initiatives, the degree in how involved they get to an organization differs; depending on several factor such as their own personal values, interests, culture, and financial situation. The findings further indicate that the consumers would appreciate that organizations publically communicate their CSR initiatives slightly more than what they do today.

Previous research has been reviewed prior to conducting this thesis. There were found several similarities between the findings in this study and what is found in the literature, indicating that the factors reported as influential in this study corresponds to what consumers in other studies regard as important.

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Introduction

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is defined as “a commitment to improve community well-being through discretionary business practices and contributions of corporate resources” (Kotler & Lee 2004, p.3).

The concept CSR is broadly applied and represents several social issues (Campbell, 2007) such as donations towards charity, developing leisure and training centers for employees, sponsoring sport teams and local schools, environmentally friendly measurements etc (Carroll, 1991). CSR activities may also be the involvement of ethnic minorities and people with disabilities into employment, emphasizing the importance of equality (Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001).

Most organizations, no matter what business they represent, have some sort of CSR initiatives; however, not all organizations communicate these engagements as loudly as others.

Seen from a business point of view, there are several reasons why organizations implement CSR initiatives. Numerous researches have found that organizations that focus on being socially responsible can increase their financial performance, build a strong image and identity, improve their relationships with stakeholders etc (Rundle-Thiele & McDonald, 2008; Pedersen & Neergaard, 2009).

Organizations recognize that consumers are a powerful stakeholder group and know the importance of meeting the consumer's expectations. Already in 1991, Carroll presented a four-part pyramid model of corporate social responsibility that described the responsibilities consumers believed the organizations had. Consumers do not appear to expect less from organizations now than what they did 20 years ago, if anything; it's the opposite.

Organizations see that consumers reward organizations that act socially responsible, and therefore many choose to implement CSR initiatives to get favorable outcomes. These

outcomes may be that consumers show higher purchasing intention, willingness to pay more for a product or service, increased reputation, higher loyalty etc (Du et al. 2007; Bhattacharya et al. 2008).

According to Moloney (2006), organizations focus on being socially responsible because it has a positive effect on their image and reputation, as well as it attracts stakeholders. However, empirical literature emphasizes that there are several aspects that impact the consumer's evaluation in regards to supporting a CSR focused organization. These may be the perceived motivation behind the CSR implementation, personal factors, external factors etc. In other words, it is difficult to know how a consumer will react towards the CSR initiatives that organizations have.

Research question

The question at hand is: What do consumers experience as important in their evaluation of and behavior towards CSR focused organizations? Do consumers reflect over possible disadvantages associated with the use of CSR?

The term *evaluation* will in this paper represent the meanings and opinions that consumers make up in regards to socially responsible organizations. This evaluation further leads to some sort of *behavior*. This behavior represents actions that involve the engagement (or lack of engagement) that they have towards CSR focused organizations, for instance purchasing a product or a service, talking about the organization to others etc.

Background for choosing the topic

The topic CSR caught my attention because it seems that the interest for CSR is at an all time high, both for consumers and organizations. Organizations appear to focus greatly on implementing CSR initiatives, hoping that these will give them advantages. It will however be interesting to investigate whether consumers in fact respond as well towards these CSR initiatives as organizations believe they do. Through a qualitative study of consumers, I will

try to get a deeper understanding of what consumers really think of CSR initiatives. It will also be interesting to see if consumers are questioning the CSR usage that organizations have, or simply regard as positive.

Literature review

In this chapter of the thesis I will present a critical overview of empirical work done in the field of CSR, and angle it towards the stakeholder: consumer.

The concept CSR

As early as 1946, business executives were asked about their social responsibilities in the magazine *Fortune* (Fortune, 1946, as cited in Bowen, 1953, p. 44). In 1953, Brown published the book “Social Responsibilities of the Businessman”, which many claimed was the beginning of the intensive research that has been done in the field of CSR (Carroll, 1999). Brown described how 700 large businesses had the power and opportunity to affect others in a positive way. He raised several relevant questions, but one in particular stood out: “What responsibilities to society may businessmen reasonably be expected to assume?” (Brown, p. 11). He defined the responsibilities of businessmen as: “It refers to the obligations of businessmen to pursue those policies, to make those decisions, or to follow those lines of action which are desirable in terms of the objectives and values of our society” (Brown, p. 6).

In the following years, several new definitions describing CSR aroused. Amongst these, William C. Frederick’s (1960) definition was seen to be a valuable contribution at such an early stage. He emphasized that social responsibility is not only objectives and values to society as Brown stated, but rather that “[Social responsibilities] mean that businessmen should oversee the operation of an economic system that fulfills the expectations of the public (Frederick, 1960, p. 60).”

CSR is now considered to be a normal part of business (Franklin, 2008). Through a survey performed by the Economist in 2008, it was shown that 95% of the corporations know

the importance of meeting the public's expectations of being socially responsible (Franklin, 2008). The Giving USA Foundation (2009) reported that in 2009, close to 305 billion dollars was given to charitable organizations in the US alone. That year was one of the worst years for US economy since the Great Depression. The fact that organizations still donate such funds indicates that organizations do prioritize being socially responsible (Giving USA Foundation, 2009).

Reasons why organizations engage in CSR activities

The reasons why organizations choose to be socially responsible differs, but according to academic literature, most organizations are driven by one or more of these main aspects: performance, motivation and stakeholders (Fombrun, 2005; Porter & Kramer, 2002; Husted, 2003; Jenkins, 2005). Moloney (2006) has captured some of the main incentives in why organizations focus on being socially responsible "it is likely to attract sales and reputation, donors and supporters" (p.50).

Based on a finding by Sen et al. (2006) and Neville and Menguc (2006), the implementation of CSR initiatives may have multiple effects on an organization. Take for instance an organization that highly focuses on CSR as a way to attract consumers; will at the same time attract other important stakeholders, such as investors and employees. This can be explained by the fact that people want to be associated with organizations that are seen to display CSR initiatives (Bevan & Wilmott 2002).

In a study performed by McKinsey & Company in 2006, it was found that organizations mainly implement CSR initiatives because executives believe that these activities will give them a greater advantage over others, and these initiatives will create more favorable outcomes with stakeholders (McKinsey & Company as cited in Bhattacharya et al., 2009). These assumptions are confirmed in a study performed by the Economic Intelligence Unit (EIU) in 2008; where they looked at 715 top international organizations. The organizations

who had CEO's with strong social, ethical, and environmental responsibilities showed a significant increase in both higher profit (16%, while non-CSR focused organizations increased their profit by 7%) and share prices (45%, while non-CSR focused organizations had 12%) compared to similar organizations that failed to be as committed (EIU, 2008).

EIU's (2008) findings show that organizations can increase their financial performance by implementing CSR initiatives, something that is supported by numerous researchers (Maignan & Ferrell, 2001; Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001; Brown & Dacin, 1997; Sen et al. 2006; Rundle-Thiele & McDonald, 2008; Pedersen & Neergaard, 2009).

Organizations recognize that consumers are a powerful and influential stakeholder group (Podnar, 2008) and that they find CSR to be an important issue (Beckmann, 2006; Morsing & Schultz, 2006).

Consumers are socially aware

Already in the early 90s, studies reported that consumers were showing high interest in CSR (Creyer & Ross, 1997). Carroll's (1991) four-part pyramid model of corporate social responsibility describes what consumers require, expect and desire from organizations. It consists of the four stages: (a) economic responsibility, (b) legal responsibility, (c) ethical responsibility and (d) philanthropic responsibility (where the economic responsibilities are at the first level of the pyramid). According to Carroll (1991, p.4) "CSR should be framed in such a way that entire business responsibilities are embraced in order to be accepted by organizations and business-people".

The economic responsibility refers to the obvious responsibilities any organization has, such as providing safe and fair paid jobs to their employees, a good return to their investors, quality products, services to their customers etc. These responsibilities are the minimum demands of any organization, and it is imperative that they are followed if they wish to stay in business.

The legal responsibilities are the laws and regulations that organizations need to obey. However, there are common incidents showing organizations breaking these rules (often when focusing extensively on the economical responsibilities). According to Corroll (1991), laws are the basis of any society and they reflect moral views. Following these responsibilities are the minimum demands for any organization wanting to be viewed as socially responsible.

The ethical responsibility has to do with organizations doing the “right thing”, without being compelled to do so by laws and regulations. Regardless of not being enforced to do so by law, they are still expected to act ethically by the society; a stakeholder group just as important as the government.

The philanthropic responsibilities refer to the top part of the pyramid, and in a business context this has to do with issues such as improving society; employee satisfaction; local communities etc. These responsibilities are not required but are rather desired by the society. Some commonly known CSR initiatives are donations towards a charity organization, developing leisure/training centers for their employees, sponsoring sport teams and local school (Corroll, 1991).

McWilliams and Siegel (2001) define CSR as “actions that appear to further some social good, beyond the interests of the firm and that which is required by the law” (p.117). Based on this citation it is the two last steps in Carroll’s (1991) pyramid (the ethical and philanthropic responsibilities) that consumers view as CSR initiatives (McWilliams & Siegel, 2001).

McWilliams and Siegel’s (2001) definition emphasizes that CSR initiatives are undertaken on the basis of doing good, and not to further the organization’s best interest. Empirical work recognizes that there are those organizations, which in fact focus on being socially responsible mainly because it is the right thing to do, and not to achieve certain benefits amongst stakeholders (Pedersen & Neergaard, 2006).

However, in most cases, this is not the main reason why organizations implement CSR initiatives. They know by neglecting to be socially responsible, it might result in harming their stakeholder relationships (Webb et al. 2008). Therefore, they focus on CSR as a way of doing business, as they recognize the importance of meeting the consumer's expectations and desires (Argenti & Haley, 2006; Paine, 2001).

In return, when organizations meet these expectations and desires, consumers reward them (Webb et al. 2008) by for instance prioritizing their products and services (Luo & Bhattacharya, 2006). In addition to consumers being more attracted to these products and services, they may also have a higher purchasing intention (Mohr & Webb, 2005) and be willing to pay more for them (Laroche et al. 2001). Other ways consumers reward CSR focused organizations are by spreading a positive word of mouth and this way improving the organizations reputation and image (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004).

Studies also show that consumers may show long- term brand loyalty towards CSR focused organization (Du et al. 2007; Bhattacharya et al. 2008). It is even found that these positive CSR attitudes can make consumers remain loyal towards an organization, even if the organization encounters a (non-CSR related) crisis (Bhattacharya & Sen 2003; Ellen et al. 2000).

CSR initiatives can be seen as a sort of insurance for the organization future wise, as it creates goodwill amongst consumers. Mohr et al. (2001) described CSR as "A company's commitment to minimizing or eliminating any harmful effects and maximizing its long-run beneficial impact on society" (Mohr et al., 2001, p. 47). This is supported by McWilliams and Siegel (2001), who found that correct CSR initiatives may have positive effect on an organization in the long- run, as it contributes to enhance their reputation; making them seem more trustworthy and dependable.

Personal factors

The way consumers behave towards a socially responsible organization often comes down to what consumers value, and what they regard to have meaning for them selves (Cherrier, 2006). However, understanding what consumer's value is not as easy as it might seem. What one individual regards to be of high importance may for someone else have little or no value.

Social and ethical consumption is according to Rowley and Moldoveanu (2003) a result of an individual's own personal values, morals and priorities. This type of consumption is most often interest-based.

An individual's religion may also be a strong influence on how socially and ethically concerned someone might be. Ramasamy et al. (2010) found that self proclaimed religious individuals in Hong Kong and Singapore showed a higher supportiveness for organizations that implement CSR initiatives, and were willing to pay more for products and services produced by organizations that displayed ethical and social behavior compared to those with less religious views.

Green & Peloza (2011) found that individuals who engage in ethical and social consumption are left with one or more of the following: (a) emotional value, (b) social value and (c) functional value. Emotional value refers to the "good feeling" one gets and the sense of doing something positive.

Social value has to do with how people believe others view and judge them when consuming. They may feel that it is often more "correct" to consume products and services with CSR attributes (Yoon et al., 2006). Many consumers believe that by promoting products and services that contain CSR features, they might look "better" in other people's eyes. Through their purchase they are able to define themselves in their community (Aaker, 1999; Shavitt & Nelson, 2004), and for many it might be very appealing to define himself or herself

as someone who cares for society (Goldstein et al., 2008).

Functional value refers to the practical benefits that consumer's get when they purchase products or services containing CSR attributes (Green & Peloza (2011). The following two statements capture the consumer's view when it comes to engaging in social and ethical consumption:

"Fuel efficiency standards save the environment, but after a few years, long term, it saves you money. When these things go hand in hand, I find these are a real seller for me. That's a very competitive picture" (Green & Peloza, 2011, P.51).

"Even with make-up, I buy MAC and I know they recycle their packaging, and they encourage people to bring it in when you are done with it. If you bring in five empty containers, they will give you a free lipstick so they encourage that [recycling]" (Green & Peloza, 2011, p. 51).

The cost benefit associated with ethical and social consumption is a main incentive for consumers to choose these products and service over others. In addition, the perceived health benefit associated with this type of consumption may also play a significant role. Organic food is regarded as healthier and more nutritious amongst consumers, and this perception is a main driver in people's purchasing pattern (Essoussi & Zahaf, 2008).

Many consumers desire products and services with CSR attributes because they see a "win-win" situation. Not only do they get to contribute to society, but also at the same time the consumers obtain a functional value associated with the consumption (Green & Peloza, 2011).

However, determining what a consumer values with a product or service is not as easy as it seems. Take for instance the attributes of soap; scent, packaging, brand name and possibly a CSR attribute such as non-animal testing. Knowing if a consumer values the CSR initiative, or values the scent is difficult to establish, and should not be assumed (McWilliams

& Siegel, 2011).

As ethical consumption is a result of what consumers find a meaning with, the type of product or service provided will matter. Carrigan, M. & Attalla (2001) found that consumers will have a lower ethical and social concern when buying a low involvement product such as a pen, as they will when investing in more important things that may influence their own lives (such as for instance a car). Consumers that engage in ethical and social consumption are left with more than just the product or service they consume; they are left with a sense of wellbeing (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004).

Based on findings from Cohen & Higham (2011) guilt may also be a reason why consumers choose to engage in socially responsible organizations. Consumption in today's society is at an all time high. Therefore, when consumers support CSR focused organizations that "give back to society" it might help to convince themselves that all their consumption is supported. Take for instance the traveling industry. Every year millions of consumers undertake numerous trips. Cohen & Higham (2011) found that regardless of consumers being highly aware that their traveling does contribute to pollution, they still prioritize traveling above other things. They found that although consumers are willing to contribute to society in many ways, they would not sacrifice one thing: their holidays. One consumer in their study responded the following when asked what she believed traveling does to the environment:

"To be honest, I don't dare to think about it. Because then I have to say to myself—'why are you traveling so much?' But I like it—that's why it was very easy to buy this [voluntary carbon offset]. I said 'ok, I have done that, so now I can travel.' But inside, I'm not feeling good, because I am thinking of it and I have kids" (Cohen & Higham, 2011, p.13).

This statement captures what consumers may think about the contradicting issue surrounding traveling. On the one hand consumers are showing high interest for CSR and expect

organizations to be socially responsible (Beckmann, 2006; Morsing & Schultz, 2006), but at the same time, they themselves are contributing to worsen the environment by flying so frequently. Cohen & Higham (2011) concluded that consumers will not stop traveling all together, but the consumers “buy” a better conscience by choosing to support air travel organizations that focus on being carbon friendly.

Auger and Devinney’s (2007) found that although consumers are willing to pay more for products and services that include ethical and social attributes (Laroche et al., 2001), a person’s economical situation may be a main factor in whether they engage in ethical and social consumption. Green & Peloza (2011) found that although consumers have a highly socially responsible attitude, and wish to support organizations that implement CSR initiatives, consumers also have a clear understanding of how they should prioritize, e.g. in the case of recession. In Green & Peloza’s (2011) study one participant said that: “If you have the choice of buying something that was more environmentally responsible or something you can actually afford and you have a whack of starving kids, you’re going to make a decision pretty quick on that” (Green & Peloza 2011, p. 51).

External factors

In the process of influencing consumers to purchase services and products based on ethic and social concern, several aspects should be taken into consideration, such as a culture and nationality. Auger et al. (2010) compared how consumers in six different countries regard ethical and social issues. The countries were Germany, Spain, the US, Korea, Turkey and India. All participants were asked to rank 16 issues from highest to lowest importance. Their findings revealed that four issues scored higher than average in all the countries. These were good working conditions, human rights, child labor and safe working conditions. Their study also showed that the same four issues scored under average in all six countries. These were genetically modified materials, using recyclable materials, using recyclable packaging and

using animal byproducts. Their results indicate that regardless of cultures or country of residence, there are some social and ethical issues that are viewed with greater importance than others (Auger et al. 2010).

There were in total 16 issues questioned, and only 8 of them scored in the category “over average” and “under average”. The remaining 8 issues were regarded with different importance among the consumers in the six countries. This indicates that the consumers will perceive CSR causes individually, based on their own personal interest and values (Rowley & Moldoveanu, 2003).

According to Hoffsted (1980) culture can play a significant part in how people think and behave. He suggests that people already early in their childhood are programmed to think a certain way by their families. This way of thinking will later be reinforced in schools and institutions. He has presented the following five culture dimensions: power/distance (PD), masculinity (MAS), uncertainty/avoidance index (UAI), long-term orientation (LTO) and individualism (IDV).

Individualism refers to how committed people are towards others in their community. Societies that score high on this index usually have a low connection with others in their community other than their family and closest friends. Beyond these relationships, people in a highly individualism society do not create a lot of interpersonal relationships, and do not focus much on sharing of responsibilities. Societies that score low on the IDV index have a stronger connection to others within their community. They have a higher incentive to take care of others, and show a higher intention to take responsibilities for others well-being. There is a stronger sense of community in societies with low IDV (Hoffsted, 1980)

Howard and Patricia (2006) argue that people are unique, and act and behave in different ways, and that this will have an effect in how they respond to CSR activities. They claim that there are some products and services containing CSR attributes that may appeal

stronger to certain individuals than others. In a study conducted at the central cost of California, results showed that women, European- Americans, and younger people are most attracted to products that emphasize the moral treatment of animals, while Latinos tend to focus more on CSR initiatives that concern the working conditions (wages, rights) of people within the production of food (Howard & Patricia, 2006).

The way consumers perceive a CSR focused organization may also be a result of the media. This is a very powerful tool, and it can either help improve an organization's reputation, or destroy it; ultimately affecting the way consumers judge and behave towards a certain organization (Zyglidopoulos et al. 2009). Take for instance Johnsen & Johnsen, which is portrayed by the media as an organization that focuses highly on CSR. This positive media coverage is partly why Johnsen & Johnsen has such a strong reputation, and why consumers are staying loyal towards their product and willing to pay more for them, even though there are so many more affordable substitutes available on the market (McWilliams & Siegel 2011).

Image, brand quality and price

According to Grewal (1998) three main components play a part in how consumers respond towards an organization. These are the quality of the brand/merchandise, price/promotion and the organization's image. In many cases all of these components need to be present for consumers to positively engage in an organization. Those organizations that understand the importance of these factors have good opportunities to strengthen their own competitive situation. Especially important is the organizational image. Those organizations that neglect this part will have problems attracting consumers regardless of having the other two components in place (the quality of the brand/merchandise, price/promotion).

Many organizations have recognized that having a good and strong image is a determining factor for their success; and therefore spend significantly resources on both

developing and endorsing this (Grewal, 1998).

Organizations that offer similar products and services as their competitors, may choose to implement CSR initiatives as a way to differentiate themselves, creating an image that they care about others (Moloney, 2006). However, an organization should never assume they could compensate their corporate abilities (CA) with a high focus on CSR, as it is first and foremost the CA that creates corporate credibility with the consumers (Becker-Olsen & Hill, 2006).

The latter findings are consistent with Berens et al. (2005) who found it is an organization's CA that is the main aspect that consumers associate with organization. This is the primary component that leads to corporate credibility. In a study performed by Green & Peloza (2011), one of their participants answered the following when asked whether he or she would purchase a product if it contains CSR attributes:

"If the product measures up, yes. But I have to be responsible too. I have to be convinced that what I am getting makes sense with how long it lasts me. So you are going to be donating this much money to build a well [...] that's great, but is the item going to last?" (Green & Peloza, 2011, p. 51).

The latter statement indicates that people do prioritize product performance over CSR initiatives (Green & Peloza, 2011). Nevertheless, if an organization has good CA and wish to distinguish themselves from their competitors, they may achieve more positive attitudes amongst consumers by portraying themselves as a CSR focused organization, than what they already have. However, for CSR initiatives to be regarded positively amongst consumers, an organization needs to take some precautions. Using CSR incorrectly may end up harming the organizations relationship with the consumers (Barone et al. 2007).

Fit

For CSR initiatives to be perceived positively by the consumers, there needs to be a fit between an organization and the causes they want to support (Becker-Olsen & Hill, 2006). According to Varadajan and Menon (1988), *fit* is defined in a social marketing perspective as: “the perceived link between a cause and the firm’s product line, brand image, positioning and target market” (p. 153).

It is imperative that an organization carefully selects which CSR initiatives they wish to engage in, and these causes correspond with their image and values (Barone et al., 2007; Schmeltz, 2012). If this fails to happen, and consumers see the organization as having low fit initiatives, it may result in several negative consequences, such as a decrease in the consumer’s overall attitude towards the organization, a decrease in the perceived corporate credibility, as well as it can reduce consumer’s buying intentions (Becker-Olsen & Hill, 2006). The better the fit is, the more likely the organization is to avoid skepticism amongst its stakeholders (Schmeltz, 2012). Skepticism is referred to as thoughts of doubt towards an organization (Elving, 2010).

In addition to the need of being a fit between an organization and the causes they want to support, there needs to be a fit between an organization’s CSR initiatives and their main target group (Pracejus & Olsen, 2004). The consumers need to see the relevance of a CSR activity (Schmeltz, 2012); therefore, organizations need to prioritize CSR activities they believe their main segment’s value, or else the consumers may perceive their CSR initiatives to have a low “personal fit” (Schmeltz, 2012).

Sweeney and Coughlan (2008) found there is often a fit between the types of business someone is in and the CSR issues they focus on. Those organizations within oil and gas, automobiles, air travel etc prioritize environmental issues, while those within retail, financial, tele-commutation sectors focus more on their customers, and ways to serve their needs.

However, it is seen that different business sectors prioritize different ethical and social areas, it does not preclude them from engaging in other ethical and social causes, only that they have a main social issue that they focus on (Sweeney & Coughlan, 2008).

It can be wise for organizations to prioritize one or two main ethical issues, as it may be difficult for consumers to orient themselves in too many causes at the same time. This can quickly become overwhelming; therefore, it is better there are some clear social and ethical areas that the organization supports. E.g. The Body Shop has one clear ethical issue, they focus on: being against animal testing (Uusitalo & Oksanen, 2004). According to Schmeltz (2012) organizations that focus on issues associated to their own field of expertise, will be perceived as more trustworthy by consumers, than those organizations with low-fit organizations.

“Low-fit initiatives negatively impact consumer beliefs, attitudes and intentions no matter what the firm’s motivation” (Becker-Olsen et al. 2006, p. 46). For organizations to get the response they desire with their CSR initiatives, they need to prioritize causes they believe will be highest appreciated by their consumers, and apply these strategically to achieve the best effect (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004).

Motives and challenges

The way consumers’ responds to CSR initiatives is a complex matter, and it often depends on the motives an organization seems to have when choosing to engage in CSR (Barone et al., 2007). According to Lichtenstein et al. (2004) an organization’s motivation for engaging in socially responsible behavior can be divided into eccentric motivation and intrinsic motivation. Eccentric motivation refers to organizations that implement CSR initiatives only to improve their profits (egoistic-driven motives). Intrinsic motivation refers to organizations that shows benevolence behavior and has a sincere concern to help others with their CSR initiatives (values-driven motives) (Ellen et al., 2006; Lichtenstein et al., 2004).

According to Barone et al. (2007), if an organization comes across as only apply CSR actions with eccentric motives, it will most likely backfire, possibly resulting in a decrease in their corporate image. This can be explained by the fact that the consumers lose respect and admiration for organizations that only use CSR initiatives as a pure marketing strategy.

Barone et al. (2007) meet some resistance amongst researchers. Sen et al. (2006) claim that consumers accept the fact that organizations have eccentric motivation to a certain degree, as long as the CSR initiatives are also tied to intrinsic motives. According to Forehand and Grier (2003), consumers actually respond better to an organization that is honest and states they have egocentric motives (eccentric) with being socially responsible, instead of portraying themselves as generally occupied with helping social causes (intrinsic), however all their actions contradict these statements.

Becker-Olsen & Hill (2006) found that if an organization is perceived to have eccentric motivation, there is no decrease in consumer's perception on the organization's credibility. These findings are consistent with Forehand and Grier's (2003) notion that consumers do not react mainly to the motivation behind the CSR initiatives (eccentric or intrinsic), but rather the inconsistency between what an organization states they are going to do and their actions. This may present some challenges for larger organizations located all around the world. Take for instance McDonald's, which is committed to minimize the unhealthy artificial trans fat in their products; however, this commitment has not been held in all countries (Stender et al. 2006).

Sometimes there are several ways to look at a CSR initiative. It may benefit some, but "harm" others. One example is Wal-Mart, which provides consumers with low-priced items, appealing to those in society with lowest incomes. At the same time, they pay their employees minimum wages, as well as they drive small independent stores out of business (Green & Peloza, 2011).

Green & Peloza, (2011) found further that consumers have a “breaking point”. Once an organization has crossed this point, it really does not matter if the organization donates to charity; consumers associate the organization with negative emotions, resulting in them not wanting to engage in it. According to the following statement, consumers do punish organizations that act irresponsible:

“I think it’s very important to avoid irresponsible organizations because I don’t want to give my money to a company that would rather take a \$100,000 fine for pollution instead of cleaning up. There are organizations like that; it’s just easier for them to pay the fine than it is for them to clean up and if I know who those organizations are I definitely won’t buy from them” (Green & Peloza, 2011, p. 51).

Green & Peloza’s (2011) findings correspond with Trudel and Cotte’s (2009) findings, which state that consumers often reach a certain point, and after this they actively start to penalize the organization. This type of behavior is described as negative ethical consumption (Smith, 2008). Organizations that neglect being socially responsible may experience consumers switching from their brand to a similar product or a service provided by a competitor (Webb et al., 2008).

Communication and awareness

Studies show that individuals who are aware about an organization’s CSR initiatives show a higher intention to engage in that organization compared to individuals with no awareness about the CSR initiatives (Sen et al., 2006). Consumers, which choose products and services based on ethical and social concern, need adequate information regarding the organization’s CSR focus. When this has successfully reached them, they are able to make an evaluation, which may lead to an ethical purchase (Carrigan & Attalla, 2001; Uusitalo & Oksanen, 2004).

However, reaching consumers with this information is not as easy as it might seem (Pomeroy & Dolnicar, 2009). Although consumers expect organizations to be socially responsible, and want to be informed about organization's CSR initiatives (Dawkins, 2004), they respond poorly to organizations that focus too much on communicate their CSR initiatives. In other words, overeagerly communicate their "good deeds" (Morsing et al., 2008; Elving & van Vuuren, 2010). One example of an organization that overeagerly communicated their good deeds was Phillip Morris, who donated 75 million dollars towards charitable organizations. The purpose was to only follow it up by a 100 million dollar campaign to announce this (Porter & Kramer 2004).

Consumers are not won over by organizations that focus too much on communicating their socially responsible actions (Barone et al., 2007; Vogel, 2006). Therefore, organizations need to be careful when communicating their CSR initiatives, and it is imperative that they ensure the reasons for focusing on CSR is clearly communicated (Baron et al., 2007). Most organizations know that explicitly communicating their CSR initiatives may lead to negative consequences (if they are unable to fulfill these obligations). Therefore, they focus on communicating their messages in a more subtle and careful manner, as this may help reduce the skepticism that consumers have against the organization (Morsing et al., 2008; Morsing & Schultz, 2006).

However, a recent study conducted by Schmeltz (2012) found contradicting evidence, suggesting that people in fact do react very positively to explicit statements such "we have now reduced our CO2 emissions by 15 percent, ten years from now it will be reduced by 50 percent"(Schmeltz, 2012 p.41). Berens and van Rekom (2008) supports Schmeltz (2012) findings, and emphasize the importance of organizations communicating their CSR initiatives clearly, truthfully and precise.

Wagner et al. (2009) have emphasized that it is not the explicit statement that causes

negative attitudes amongst consumers, but rather when organizations fail to fulfill the CSR actions they have publically announced. Therefore, organizations need to take a good look at their own corporate abilities (CA) before portraying themselves as highly socially responsible.

According to Morsing and Schultz (2006) the way organizations communicate with their stakeholder plays a significant part in whether the message they wish to send, successfully reaches the people they wish to influence. In 1984, Grunig and Hunt presented a public relations theory, a theory that has over the past decades been modified and updated. Morsing and Schultz (2006) presented an updated CSR communication model that included the three stakeholder strategies (a) information, (b) response and (c) involvement.

In the “stakeholder information strategy” communication goes one way, meaning that consumers are “told” something, without the opportunity to give any feedback to the organization. Those who frequently apply this strategy are non-profit organizations and the government. They often focus on activities such as active press relation programs and are actively producing news and informing the media, magazines, pamphlets etc in an attempt to reach the general public with their information (Morsing & Schultz 2006).

In the “stakeholder response strategy” communication goes two-ways, flowing between the organization and the public, and can be divided into symmetric and asymmetric communication. In symmetric two-way communication, both the public and the organization can alter their attitudes and behavior. With asymmetric two-way communication on the other hand, it is only the public attitudes and behaviors that is altered, as the organization will not change their ways based on the response they get from the public. Therefore the communication in the two-way asymmetric model is viewed as a way of merely understanding what the public will accept and tolerate (Morsing & Schultz 2006).

It is through the two-way symmetric communication that organizations are able to create good and strong relationships with the public (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). However, a

common mistake one often see organizations make, is to believe they have established a two-way symmetric communication with their consumers, but in fact all they have is a one-way communication: “a method of supporting and reinforcing corporate actions and identity” (Morsing & Schultz, 2006, p. 328).

The stakeholder involvement strategy is similar to two-way symmetric communication, but in addition, there is a conversation between an organization and the consumers. Some influences will occur, but it is just as likely that the consumers will influence the organization, as it is that the organization will influence the consumers. In other words, both parties are mutually influencing each other for continuous change. By choosing the latter strategy, organizations welcome and encourage consumers to take part in the decisions on which CSR initiatives the organization should focus on, rather than just making all the decisions themselves. This way consumers have a say in the matter (Morsing & Schultz, 2006).

In 1984, it was argued that 50% of all organizations used one-way communication to reach their public (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). Organizations are now being encouraged to go away from the pure information strategy (the informant is totally passive) and towards a two-way communication strategy, preferably the “stakeholder involvement strategy”. Or at least apply a combination of the information and involvement strategy (Morsing & Schultz, 2006).

Consumers will have conflicting views on how organizations should communicate their CSR initiatives towards the public. Therefore, organizations need to know whom they are trying to positively influence with their communication. Studies show that consumers react positively to reading about CSR initiatives in annual reports (Schmeltz, 2012) as consumers are under the impression that these communication sources provide more adequate and credible information (Morsing et al., 2008; Morsing and Schultz, 2006). In addition, there are many consumers who enjoy reading about organization’s CSR initiatives in magazines and

other objective sources. Finally, a highly credible information source is hearing about CSR initiatives through friends and family (Schmeltz, 2012).

Seeing that there are so many factors that can influence consumer's views on CSR, organizations need to know what ethical and social issues are of importance for their main segment, and focus on these issues in a way that they believe their consumers will react most positively to (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004).

Summery of literature

The literature shows that consumers are an important stakeholder group, which both expect and desire organizations to be socially responsible (Carroll 1991). Several studies have found that consumers respond positively towards organizations that implement CSR initiatives, in terms of improving an organizations reputation and image, showing higher buying intentions, remaining loyal etc (Rundle-Thiele & McDonald, 2008; Pedersen & Neergaard, 2009, Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001; Brown & Dacin, 1997).

The literature does however emphasize that there are numerous factors that influence consumer's evaluation and behavior in terms of an organization's CSR initiatives. These are among others personal factors, cultural factors, financial factors, the fit, the organization's motivation and communication.

The literature seem to focuses much on investigating CSR from the organizations point of view, instead of from the consumer's point of view. Based on that, this thesis is constructed to understand what consumers experience as influential factors in terms of their evaluation and behavior towards CSR focused organizations.

Design and Method

This chapter of the thesis contains the central elements concerning the data collection, as well as a description and evaluation of the studies validity and reliability. The topic of interest was to investigate “What consumers experience as important in their evaluation of and behavior towards CSR focused organizations. And also whether consumers reflect over possible disadvantages associated with the use of CSR”.

Throughout the thesis Jacobsen’s (2000) model was used as a guideline. The five main steps in his model are: developing a problem statement, choice of method, collecting data, analyzing the data and interpreting the results.

Research design

The type of design used in a study comes down to what subject the researcher wants to investigate and the problem statement. It is imperative that the type of social research one is conducting fits the examined question.

I will be conducting descriptive research, as the purpose of this study is to describe the characteristics of a population or a phenomenon (Neuman, 2009). In addition the study will contain elements of exploratory research, seeing that these two often tend to blend together in practice (Neuman, 2009). In exploratory research one looks into areas that have not yet been extensively studied.

When conducting research on real-life events, there are two main approaches; deductive and inductive research design. According to Nachmias and Nachmias (1992) ideas and theory should come prior to conducting empiricism (deductive approach). By doing so, a researcher can attempt to approve or refute thoughts and ideas through tests of refutation.

Other researchers argue that one first needs to conduct the empirical work prior to devolving theory (inductive approach). Robert Merton (1968), p. 103) captures the essence of using inductive research in the following statement:

“It is my central thesis that empirical research goes far beyond the passive role of verifying and testing theory; it does more than confirm or refute hypotheses. Research plays an active role; it performs at least four major functions, which helps shape the development of theory. It initiates, it reformulates, it deflects and it helps clarify.”

As the goal of the study was to get a deeper understanding of the ways that consumers think and behave in terms of CSR, I needed to use an inductive research design, and investigate the topic prior to developing theory.

Qualitative method

In every study one needs to provide empirical evidence in order to answer the research question, and this evidence is found through two forms of data: quantitative and qualitative.

According to Punch (2005) quantitative research is based on measures and magnitude. It focuses on collecting sizeable amounts of data from a sample, with the aim of generalizing the results to be representative of a larger population. This type of research gathers data in forms of numbers (Punch, 2005). Qualitative research on the other hand is not based on the same measurements and magnitude as quantitative research. According to Patton (1990):

“Qualitative research aims at understanding people, from their point of view. Its purpose is to describe how people behave and to understand why they behave the way they do; it neither determines cause or effect, not tests hypotheses or theories that researchers might have about human behavior” (p. 40).

This type of research is favorable when you are interested in investigating peoples life history or everyday behavior (Silverman, 2006). In qualitative research one gathers data in form of words, and do not use the same pre-determined categories as in a quantitative study (Lappan & Quartaroli, 2009).

For the present study a qualitative research design was applied, providing a deeper understanding of what consumers think in terms of CSR, and to collect detailed information about their behavior.

Sample

The sample consisted of 10 consumers, 5 women and 5 men, all ranging from the age of 23 to 65. They were all currently living in Stavanger, and were chosen through snowball sampling. This method has similarities to convenient sampling; which relies on using a sample that is easily accessible and close to hand (Berg, 2007). Snowball sampling “locates subjects with certain attributes or characters necessary in the study (Lee, 1993, as cited in Berg 2007 p. 44)”. It is an ideal approach when addressing sensitive topics and is conducted by first identifying a few people who seem to possess the characteristics that you are looking for in your study and then interviewing them (Lee, 1993).

After each interview, I asked the informants to refer me to someone else who they believed had relevant information for my study. This way I got a chain of subjects, all based on the referral from one person to the next. By using this method, I aimed to reach a wide variety of men and women, representing different life experiences, thoughts and attitudes.

When selecting informants through snowballing sampling, you never really know when you have a sufficient amount of participants. I decided to stop with 10 participants as I felt there was a saturation of new information.

Procedure

The data was collected through 10 in-depth interviews, and these were all conducted within a two- week timeframe. The location of the interviews differed, depending on the preferences of the informants. Most of the informants preferred to conduct the interview at their work place, the rest in a café in town, as well as in their own homes.

I chose to conduct in- depth interviews, which is a form of conversation between two individuals (Maso, 1987). This approach was applied because it allowed me to go deep into the subject that I was studying (Boyce & Neale, 2006), and is ideal when you want to learn about someone's social life (Boeije 2010). The interviews were performed *face-to-face*, primarily because it allowed me to meet the informants in person. By doing so, I was able to interpret their body language and tone of voice (something that would not be possible by interviewing through internet). In addition, I believe that I was able to go deeper with the informants *face to face*, as it might be less intimidating to answer questions when *face-to-face*, rather than being asked to elaborate about this topic over the phone or internet.

Conducting in-depth interviews seemed to be the most compatible method for this study. This can be explained by the fact that the topic CSR may be perceived as a sensitive issue. If I had applied a different method, such as focus groups, it might have restricted the informants in speaking up and sharing their true opinions. This may have resulted in my findings not portraying reality, but a perceived reality. The informants may have given me answers they found "more suited", and that perhaps reflect them in a "better light" in front of others.

Through performing in-depth interviews, I believe the informants opened themselves more up to me and provided me with adequate information that reflected their true thoughts and behaviors.

Prior to conducting the interviews I tried to prepare myself well. By studying several writings on interview techniques (Boyce and Neale, 2006; Jacobsen, 2000; Merriam, 2009) it helped to perform the interviews as correctly and professional as possible. These writings emphasized that it was important to ask clear, relevant, and truly open-ended questions.

Every interview was initiated with a short introduction of myself as well as the informants were told how the interview would proceed and how long it would last. In addition

they were all reassured that their identity would be kept confidential. This was of high importance, as the informants needed to trust they could speak freely. It seemed as though most of them relaxed more after getting this reassurance.

Throughout the interviews it was important to create an environment where the informants felt comfortable. The more at ease the participant's felt, the more they seemed to want to elaborate and share personal opinions. I tried to be as open minded as possible and not jump to any conclusions.

All the informants were asked if the conversations could be recorded on tape. None of them had any objections, something that allowed me to devote all my attention to listening to what they were saying, rather than just being focused on writing down the conversation down.

The interview structure

Each interview lasted in average 40 minutes, and the interview guide contained the following six topics: a) General questions regarding consuming, b) Corporate Social Responsibility, c) The organizations motivation, d) Influence and communication, e) Personal factors, f) Rewarding and punishing CSR focused organizations

All topics were covered, but not in strict order, as I was using a semi- structured interview. This form of interviewing can be found between the structured and unstructured interviewing form.

The semi- structured interview form was chosen primarily because it allowed me high flexibility in the interviews as well as giving me the chance to ask follow-up questions; something I felt was essential for this study. This interview form allowed me to detect new and interesting angles that I most likely would have missed if I applied one of the other interview forms. Although some of the answers given in the interviews had similarities, every interview was unique, and different views and meanings seemed to constantly "pop up".

Regardless of the semi- structured interview form allowing one to freely choose the sequence of the question (Johannessen et al., 2004), I did however follow a certain sequence in the beginning of every interview. By starting to ask some easy questions regarding general consumption, it gave the informants a chance to “warm up” a bit in order to feel comfortable. When it felt right, more in-depth questions were addressed. The sequence and time spent on the remaining questions varied significantly, depending on the informant’s answer.

The use of a tape recorder made the interviews run smoothly, and made it easier to ask good follow-up questions, compared to what it would have been if everything had to be written down during the interviews. Most of the follow-up questions seemed to be welcomed, and the informants were all very talkative and eager to share their personal opinion. I tried to be aware of the informant’s body language, as well as avoiding too sensitive questions.

The semi-standardized interview method does however have some weaknesses. As I was not having identical interviews (standardized), I may have influenced the informants without being aware of it. The questions may have been asked in a particular way (body language, tone of voice etc) that influenced them to respond in a certain way. Also, I may have prejudged some of the informant’s response. In an attempt to diminish these possibilities, I focused on being as neutral and unbiased as possible.

The transcript process

Qualitative data is rarely analyzed directly from tape recordings, but first transcribed into text, and then analyzed (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). After each interview I transcribed the conversation continuously. This was a time consuming process; however, highly enlightening, as it allowed me to understand points and aspects that I did not pick up during the interview. It also made the data structured and categorized, ready to be analyzed.

Data analysis

According to Jacobsen (2000) analyzing data consists of describing, systematizing, categorizing, and binding together. When analyzing qualitative data, there are several ways of doing this. Some researchers choose to analyze it on computer programs, while others prefer to analyze the data manually.

I chose to manually organize and categorize the data into six groups, based on the themes in the interview guide. The data was reduced and abridged, and ended up containing several selected citations that were of importance. These citations were then put into tables, something that gave a good overview of the findings and made it easier to see the messages that the informants conveyed.

Categorizing the data into the themes made it easier to see patterns that were not really captured in the interviews. It also made it easier to make comparisons, showing me if any of the answers stood out of the crowd, or if there was a lot of similarities in the answers.

Validity and reliability

Two important indicators for evaluating findings as trustworthy and credible are reliability and validity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Validity has to do with whether one is measuring what one intended to measure (Lappan & Quartaroli, 2009). To increase this study's validity I pre-tested the interview questions on a family member prior to conduct the interviews. By doing so, I detected several questions that sounded "strange" when asked, as well as questions that were not understood by the test person. In addition, to improve some of the interview questions, I let a professor at the University review the interview guide for further comments and recommendations. Another important factor in determining the validity is to apply the correct method for the type of study one is conducting (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

To achieve validity in a qualitative study requires the findings to be constantly questioned and checked, and that this inspection is critically and carefully performed. One also needs to be critical to the connections found in the study. According to Neuman (2009):

“Valid measures of qualitative data validity have authenticity. Authenticity means a fair, honest and balanced account of social life from the standpoint of a person who lives in a specific social world” (p. 125).

Reliability has to do with whether a study result can be reproduced by others later in time (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). In a qualitative research every study has rare and unique factors; therefore, reliability is not measured by giving dependable and consistent results such as quantitative research, but whether you are gathering the data consistently (Neuman, 2009) and that the method used to collect the data is trustworthy and credible (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). One needs to give a detailed description of the process applied that resulted in the information received, especially the analyzing process.

All the interviews have been transcribed, categorized and analyzed. These are available and help to improve the paper’s reliability. If someone else were to review these, they might have a different interpretation of the same documents. This is often a concern when it comes to qualitative research.

In qualitative studies the purpose is not to generalize the findings from small samples to large groups, but rather find general phenomena as well as to try to understand and elaborate concepts (Jacobsen, 2000). The concept transferability is more commonly applied instead of generalization. Transferability has to do with whether the findings can be transferred to other settings and situations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Limitations

A main limitation in this study was connected to the chosen design. When conducting a non-experimental descriptive study, the main purpose is not to find cause (such it is with a

causal study) but describing a real-life phenomenon. The implications of conducting descriptive research are the findings cannot be generalized to larger populations. They do however have transferability.

In addition to limitations with the chosen design, my own role as a researcher may be considered a limitation in terms of lack of experience. I have never conducted this type of research before and had to “learn along the way”.

Empiricism

This chapter will contain the empirical findings. These will be presented through main topics in sub sections; this way making it more incorporated and organized. The findings will give an impression of what consumers experience as important in their evaluation of and behavior towards CSR focused organizations. And also if consumers reflect over possible disadvantages associated with CSR usage.

General questions regarding consuming

To get some insight in how the informant’s everyday consumption behavior is, they were asked what usually determines their overall purchases. They all responded very similar; the amount of money they have (at the time of purchase), as well as price and quality are determining factors.

The informants were further asked whether they typically bought products and services based on routine and habit, or if they liked trying new products and services. When it came to certain things, such as going grocery shopping, most of them replied that they often just bought on habit, but added that they were open for trying new products and services. This did however depend on several factors such as what mood they were in, if they had heard about the service or product in advance, if it was on sale etc. For many of the informants, it was a combination of several things. According to interviewee 4, trying new things comes down to “Whether there is a sale, and I get a lot of value for my money. But suggestions from friends

and family often influences me as well”.

Reflecting over organizations

While a couple of the informants replied that they do reflect over what organizations do in their “everyday business”, the majority of them answered that they did not really think too much about it. Interviewee 2 said: “I don’t generally reflect too much over the company I buy from. When others mention it, I do, but otherwise very little”.

This citation captured what most of the informants replied when asked whether they reflect over the organizations that they engage in. However, most of them commented they should be more concerned of knowing how the organizations they consume from act and what they stand for, instead of just buying things without any additional thought.

Regardless of the informants showing minimum interest in companies “everyday business”, a majority of them replied that they were highly occupied with company’s brands and image, and mentioned that they have been attracted to products and services with strong brands. Most of the brand names mentioned were luxury products from highly profiled companies such as Chanel, Dior, Lancôme and so on. In addition to these, Mac products were repeatedly mentioned. The rest of the products and services mentioned differed among the informants, ranging from high-end clothing lines to expensive watches and jewelry.

Moreover, all the informants replied that even though they were drawn to these products and services because they admire the brand name, they would not buy something solely because of the brand name without seeing the products or services as useful. Interviewee 10 replied: “I wouldn’t just buy something without wanting the product, regardless of it being a good brand. However, if I like the brand and the product, nothing’s better”. Interviewee 8 replied that: “I buy from high brand names based on two main factors: 1) because I like the brand name and what it symbolizes, 2) that I see these products and services as having better quality than cheaper brands.

These two citations summed up the outlook that most of the informants had towards buying products and services with strong brand names.

Social Responsibility

After a general orientation of the interviewee's overall consumption habits, the informants were asked what they associated with social responsibility. Most of the informants brought up the following topics; animal rights, environmental issues and human rights (in other parts of the world). However, beyond these, they all associated different things with social responsibility. Some said they associated CSR with supporting sports teams, others replied involving people with disabilities into labor.

A couple of the informants had a general idea of what they considered social responsibility to be. Interviewee 8 replied: "I associate social responsibility with what we can do for others. How much you care for someone else than yourself". Others such as interviewee 9 had a more specific idea of what CSR is: "I think about companies not using unnecessary plastic in their production, that they transport their goods in a way that is best for the environment, basically that they take responsibility for what they do".

Although all the informants had their own interpretation of what corporate social responsibility is; they all reported it to be an action that benefits society to a certain degree.

Advantages and disadvantages with the use of CSR

The informants were further asked whether they saw any specific negative or positive consequences with the usage of CSR. A majority of them mentioned one common disadvantage, and that was that there may be higher costs tied to be socially responsible; both for the organizations and the consumers. According to interviewee 7:

"Socially responsible products appear to be more expensive to get a hold of. For instance, it seems a lot more expensive for companies to offer local Norwegian commodities in their cantina, compared to getting similar food that has been produced

in China”.

In addition to the informants perceiving there to be higher costs tied to the CSR focused organizations, they pointed out that when organizations attempt to be socially responsible, it often ends up with the consumer having to pay more for the product and service.

Beyond the cost aspect associated to being socially responsible, the informants could not see any other disadvantages associated with the use of CSR. They did on the other hand see several advantages by implementing CSR initiatives. Not only does CSR initiatives benefit good causes, but also at the same time it benefits the organization that implements the CSR initiative.

When asked what benefits the informants believed that organizations achieved by focusing on being socially responsible, the answers differed among the informants. Some mentioned that it could help increase an organization's sales and revenue, while others mentioned that they believed by having CSR initiatives it could contribute to attract important stakeholders. Informant 2 replied: “By having a socially responsible profile, organizations gain a greater economical advantage, new markets, new suppliers etc. People want to be associated with them”.

They all reported that organizations that focus on being socially responsible most probable increase their reputation and image, and added that it is a big advantage to be known as someone who cares for others than just themselves.

All of the informants replied that they have bought from organizations that focus on being socially responsible. Two organizations that were frequently mentioned were Fair Trade and the Body Shop. Other than these, the organizations mentioned all differed in size and industry. Interviewee 1 replied: “I choose to fly with KLM because they are more environmentally friendly than other airlines, or at least that is my personal impression. The planes use less CO₂ than others”. Interviewee 7 reported “I prioritize clothing stores that focus

on buying their material and cloths from organizations (in other parts of the world) where the workers get the salary they are entitled to”.

Regardless of the informants reporting that they all have bought products and services with CSR attributes over those without, there were large distances between the mentioned CSR focused organizations.

Financial situation

The informants all acknowledged that there are probably several organizations that focus on being socially responsible without reflecting this in the price they set for their products and service. However, for the most part, the informant's associated highly socially responsible organizations, such as Fair Trade, Body Shop, Prior (eggs from freely walking chicken) etc with being higher priced than similar products. When asked how their financial situation affected their consumption, the informants gave opposing answers.

Interviewee 6 responded: “If I only had a little bit of money, I would certainly not buy anything that was more expensive, regardless of it benefiting society”. Others had a very different angle on the matter. According to interviewee 8:

“There are some things I would buy no matter what, and sacrifice other things. For instance, eggs from freely walking chickens. I believe that these eggs are better for me, and that I am helping the chicken's conditions. No matter how little money I have, I will regardless buy the more expensive eggs if this means that chickens can have a good environment and life”.

Most of the informants reported that their consumption of socially responsible products and services would mainly be affected if their financial situation worsened. When asked if anything would change, consumption wise, if their financial situation improved, all except one replied no. Interviewee 7 replied: “If I had a lot of money, I would be a lot more conscience about buying from socially responsible organizations. Then I would not have to

shop at Hennes & Mauritz. I could buy more expensive clothes, where I certainly know that the clothes are produced under good conditions for the workers”.

The rest of the informants reported that they would not add a lot of new causes to support just because they have improved their financial situation. They might however buy the products and services they were already using more frequently if they had more money.

A “better feeling” and concisions

Most of the informants had similar answers when asked what they personally felt they accomplished of buying from a socially responsible company. All the informants mentioned these two reasons; the feeling they were left with, and that it helped ease their conscience. Interviewee 3 said: “I would feel good buying from a socially responsible company, contributing in a small way to something good”. Interviewee 7 said: “I have bought from socially responsible organizations, and I think a main reason is to ease my conscience. We feel guilty over having it so good ourselves”. This guilt was frequently mentioned amongst the informants.

All the informants were further asked if they support socially responsible organizations because they believed that this could affect their social status. All of them replied no to this question. Interviewee 2 did however add: “This could be more relevant if belonging to a different social circle. However, as of today, this was not the case, as my friends are not really occupied by socially responsible issues”.

Several of the informants touched into the fact that purchasing organic food was perceived as more health conscious. The health aspect was seen as a main incentive for buying organic food, as well as the socially responsible aspect made it even more appealing.

The organization’s motivation for being socially responsible

The motivation that organizations have for implementing CSR initiatives was perceived by only one of the informants as the desire to do the right thing. According to

informant 4, organizations are socially responsible “because they have to be. We all need to think about the environment, because it is important for the future”.

Informant 1 had a slightly different view on the perceived motivation, and that was that organizations are motivated by both the desire to do the right thing, but also to enhance their profits. However, this informant added that:

“It all comes down to the company and its image and reputation. If it is a dodgy company, I would not believe that it care so much, I will automatically think that this organization wants to earn more money. But if it was a highly respected company, I would believe that it partly wants to make the society better”.

Beyond the latter statements, the remaining informants perceived the motivation that organizations have for being socially responsible as a way to make more money. They viewed it as part of the organizations corporate strategy to enhance their reputation and image. The informants reported that by being socially responsible, organizations make themselves more attractive amongst customers, investors, employees etc.

Interviewee 7 claimed: “Organizations are highly aware that by being socially responsible they will earn money in the long run. I think they have experienced that by being focusing on this, they end up getting a lot of advantages”. Interviewee 8 had similar views on the matter, describing organization’s motivation for implementing CSR initiatives as:

“Part of their commercial. Not always a cause that they actively support, but they see it as good publicity, which increases their image. And if people see them in a good way, more people might want to be associated with them”.

The informants were asked whether their behavior towards an organization could change, given they were informed that the organization was only being socially responsible to increase its profits. To this question only one of the interviewee reported that this would influence her. Informant 4 said that:

“If I found out that they just did it to increase profit I would not like it. It’s not supposed to be like that. They should do it because it is the right thing to do, not because they want to earn more money”.

However, the rest of the informants regarded the motivation that organizations have for implementing CSR initiative as more or less irrelevant, and that this would not influence their attitudes towards a company. As long as a good cause gets supported, the reasoning behind being socially responsible had minor meaning. They did however reveal that if there was inconsistency between what an organization claimed to do and their actions, they would react very negatively towards this. Otherwise, the informants said this was a win-win situation; organizations increase their image and reputation, while someone else or something else gets benefited. Interviewee 8 said: “I don’t really care what their motivation is, whether they do it to earn more money or to be kind, as long as someone benefits in the end”

Informant 3 said:

“The motivation has little meaning. I only see it as a win-win situation. I know most organizations do it just to make money, and that’s fine, as long as the cause they proclaim to support in fact gets supported. In basic, all organizations aim to earn money; that is their sole purpose. If they earn money this way, that’s fine, because others benefit by their winnings”.

Credible sources

When the informants were asked what they regarded to be credible and less credible information sources when learning about what CSR initiatives organizations have, their answers differed. Some claimed that a company’s homepage, as well as their advertisement are perceived as credible sources. Informant 5 said: “It is mainly through television that I became aware of the CSR initiatives that organizations have. And I believe they do the things they publicly communicate.”

Other informants regarded advertisement and a company's homepage as the least credible sources of all, as this comes directly from the company itself. According to informant 2, "Word of mouth is definitely the most reliable source. It is always better what an objective third party says. Other objective information sources are for instance news paper articles".

The media was also frequently mentioned as an objective source that the informants claimed they had high credibility to, in regards to learning about organizations CSR initiatives. The majority of informants replied that they consider the information that the media provides to be the true, and commented that the media is an important tool that contributes to organizations acting socially responsible. They also added the media keeps organizations under a lot of pressure to act responsible. If they fail to do this, any media will quickly expose them. The informants further reported that the media has a significant effect on an organizations image. According to informant 2: "the media has the ability to strip the organizations bare, and show the world who they really are. It must be very hard to build up your image again if you are very negatively portrayed in the media".

Organizations with high CSR focus

When the informants were asked to list up 3 organizations they associate with having high social responsibility, most of them mentioned the same well-known organizations; the Body Shop and Fair Trade. Other than these, they only mentioned a few other organizations with high CSR focus. When asked why they knew of these other organizations, the majority of informants answered that it was because they were already customers there. Never the less, they all struggled mentioning 3 other organizations (beyond the ones they were already using).

Informant 1 said:

"I think of organizations such as KLM and the Body Shop. But to be honest, I don't really know of too many organizations that profile themselves as highly socially

responsible. I assume most have CSR initiatives, but I don't automatically associate any other organizations with having a high CSR identity.

Informant 3 had a similar response and said:

"I think of Fair Trade, the Body Shop and Mac. But I mostly know of the ones I already buy from. There is also the airline SAS with the option to purchase a CO₂ quota. But I should know of more, but can't really mention a lot. I am totally blank".

The majority of the informants replied that the reason for them not knowing too much about what socially responsible initiatives organizations have, was a result of the little information organizations sent out to the public.

Communication

The amount of information that the informants wanted organizations to send out to the public differed. A few felt that organizations should keep their CSR initiatives as little to themselves, claiming that it is supposed to be a good cause and not a marketing stunt.

Interviewee 2 stated that:

"The less credit that organizations take for the positive work they do in the field of social responsibility, the better, because then it seems as if a company does it for the cause, and not just to earn extra benefits".

However, the majority of informants encourage organizations to communicate their CSR initiatives, claiming that unless these are made public, it is hard for them to know what socially responsible actions organizations are taking. A majority of the informants made it clear that if choosing one product over another leads to someone else benefitting, and the price and quality is similar, the choice is easy. But due to lack of information, they feel that they are in no position to make that decision.

They further stated that they could be more active in finding information themselves, but have neither the time nor the patience to spend hours looking this up. More information

would be greatly appreciated, as long as it is not too extensively communicated.

Many emphasized that communicating this commitment too strongly may have negative effects in terms of backfiring to the organization. According to interviewee 9:

“If an organization communicates their CSR initiatives too heavily, it’s not good. If you frequently hear that the company uses environmentally friendly products with less plastic and so on, it may become too much and have an opposite effect. But by discretely letting us know that they are socially responsible is appreciated by the consumers”.

Interviewee 1 had similar views on the matter, claiming that CSR initiatives should be communicated to the public, but there is a limit:

“I would like them to mention it, but at the same time, I do not want them to mention it and advertise it too much. This way, we know that they do, but when they start advertising it too much, and glorify themselves too much, then I get a bit fed up”.

When the informants were asked whether they would prefer an organization to explicitly or implicitly communicate their CSR commitment to the public, most of the informants replied that they did not really have any specific preferences. They were however more concerned with knowing concrete results.

Interviewee 8 said:

“I am more occupied with results, not so much what they promise. Their commitment can be implicitly communicated in my opinion; however the result can be explicitly communicated. E.g. so much have we done in 2012, next year we want to achieve more. They do not have to say for instance next year we will have 3% more...”

Something that many of the informants brought up was that if an organization communicates their promises too explicitly, they might end up disappointing the customers if they cannot keep this.

Some of the informants replied that they in general were used to organizations disappointing in terms of delays, founding and so on. Therefore, there was some agreement amongst the informants that it was better that the organizations present a more implicit commitment, and instead communicate more accurate and concrete results when achieved.

Rewarding and punishing organizations

All the informants were asked if they believed they would have more goodwill towards socially responsible organizations that met a crisis, compared to organizations with no CSR focus meeting the same crisis. The answers to this differed, depending on several aspects. As long as the crisis that the CSR focused organization met had no correlation with social responsibility, the informants would look away. Interviewee 10 replied that: “After the oil spill from the Macondo accident in the Gulf of Mexico in April 2010 (Transocean), I would still fill up the gas tank from BP gas stations, because that accident could honestly happen anywhere and for any company, and I regard them as a good company”.

However, if the crisis that a CSR focused organization met was tied to social responsibility, the majority of informants replied that they would not disregard this.

Interviewee 10 further replied that:

“If I support a company that claims it supports equal rights and benefits for male and female with the same job and title, but in reality it doesn’t; then I would not have any goodwill to that company in the future”.

Most of the informants had this outlook on organizations focusing on CSR; that it can be used as insurance and goodwill, given they encounter a non-CSR related crisis.

When the informants were asked if they ever had punished organizations that acted socially irresponsible, only one of the interviewee replied yes. The interviewee 7 said:

“Yes, I stopped drinking Coca Cola for a while, because I read an article about how poorly conditions their workers in Colombia had. And those workers who tried to speak

up against this injustice, went missing, executed etc. So a lot of bad stuff was going on”. Although the majority of the informants replied they have yet to punish organizations that act socially irresponsible, they emphasized that if made aware of any irresponsible activity in the future; they would give a reaction. This reaction can for instance be to stop to consuming the products or services from the relevant organization, or giving a negative reputation by spreading the experienced view that caused this reaction etc.

Although most of the informants replied that they could punish organizations that act socially irresponsible, they expressed that there needs to be good substitutes available. That it is harder to punish an organization that you are highly dependent on, regardless of whether one agree with their actions or not. Never the less, most of the informants replied that if they have several alternative organizations to choose from (all offering similar products and services), they would quickly switch from the socially irresponsible organization to a competing organization. According to informant 9:

“If it was a product I can live without, I would be more critical towards their socially irresponsible actions, than what I would be if it is something that I really need or want, and there are now real substitutes”.

All the informants also responded that a primary reason for punishing a company (other than them acting irresponsible) would be that there was inconsistency between what they claim to do, and actually do. If it turns out that a company has not been fulfilling the obligations they have declared, especially publically declared, it would result in negative consequences.

Determining factors for consumers

The last topic in the interview consisted of what the informants regarded as determining factors if they were to choose products or services from a socially responsible organization over those with no known CSR focus. Most of the informants mentioned one or all of the following three aspects: that they have been made aware of the CSR initiatives that

an organization have; that these products or services are easy accessible, as well as the organization's CSR initiative correspond to the causes the consumers value and prioritize. In addition to these aspects, all the informants mentioned that these products or services needs to contain equally high quality, as substituting products and services, as well as the price needs to be acceptable.

Interviewee 10 said:

”For me to consume from a socially responsible company over one with no CSR focus, I would have to be aware of their CSR initiatives. In addition, these products need to be easy to get a hold of. For instance, offered in the shop I already use etc. I can't drive 1 hour just to buy a certain product because it is socially responsible”.

Although a majority of the informants replied they think it is good that organizations are focusing on “giving back” to the society, they added that these CSR initiatives are not in itself a determine factor for purchasing a certain product or a service. However, they are regarded as a big advantage, and it can be seen as a determining factor if they have to choose between two similar products or services. Never the less, they all reported that it is an organization's CA that is the determining factor in their purchases.

Discussion

In this chapter of the thesis I will discuss the empirical findings and compare them to relevant theory and earlier research. Recent studies have highlighted the role CSR initiatives can effect the consumers. The present study looks at what consumers experience as important in their evaluation of and behavior towards CSR focused organizations. The study also investigates whether the consumers reflect over possible disadvantages associated with CSR usage.

Culture and nationality

Carroll's (1991) four-part pyramid model of corporate social responsibility indicates that organizations need to fulfill more than the basic requirements when doing business, they also need to integrate social responsibilities into their organization. According to McWilliams and Siegel (2001), it is the top part of the pyramid; the ethical responsibility and philanthropic responsibility that consumers regard to be the social responsibilities. Carroll's (1991) model describes the ethical responsibility as to what is expected by the society, while the philanthropic responsibility merely is desired.

The findings in this study indicate the consumers did not merely desire philanthropic responsibility, they in fact expected it (on an equal level as ethical responsibility). It seemed as though they all took for granted that organizations in some way "give back" to the society, by simply assuming that organizations are just socially responsible to a certain degree. The informants did however not convey specifically how they expect organizations to act with regards to being socially responsible, rather a general idea that included organizations having a socially responsible attitude and behavior.

This view on social responsibility could be a result of culture. Based on Hofstede's (1984) culture dimension, societies are either collective or individualistic. Norway scores 69 on the individualism index while the US scores 91. As the US has the highest score on the

individualism index in the world, it may partly explain why the American consumers only desire philanthropic responsibility, but do not expect it. People living in the US might be more concerned with their own well being than others, as this is how they have been taught to think and act by its society (where the American Dream plays a major role). Therefore, when organizations in the US display philanthropic responsibility, it is only desired and not expected by the society. However, in Norway, a less individualistic society, consumers may take for granted that organizations have CSR initiatives, as it is part of the Norwegian culture to think more collective.

In addition to the informants expecting organizations to have some sort of social responsibility, the majority of them reported that they perform acts that benefit society. These acts did however differ significantly, ranging from using public transport to supporting charity. The views the informants had on socially responsible actions could be a result of background and childhood. According to informant 10:

”When growing up, I was taught early to recycle garbage, give to charity, save electricity (by switching of lights) etc. All these “habits” have followed me into my grown up life. I don’t know if I would be this socially responsible if it had not been for learning it at home.”

The majority of the informants added that not only did they expect organizations to be socially responsible, but also that people in general should act socially responsible. It seemed as though helping out those less fortunate; helping to preserve nature etc was considered as a natural part of life for the informants.

Although the informants had different impressions of what CSR represents, there were however three socially responsible issues that got frequently mentioned. These were animal rights, environmental issues and human rights (in other parts of the world). In a previous study conducted by Auger et al. (2007) it was found that: good working conditions; human

rights; child labor and safe working conditions were regarded as the most important social issues for individuals representing several countries. These findings were not present in the same degree in this study.

This could be because people in Norway have such good working and living conditions. What people in other parts of the world merely desire, such as safe working conditions, people in Norway already have, and take for granted with no additional thought. For those living in countries where this is not “part of their everyday life”, it is understandable that issues such as good working and public health conditions, human rights etc may concern them higher than other issues.

The fact that animal rights are not perceived as a highly important issue throughout the world, could relate to countries view things differently. Some cultures may see animals as pets; others see the same animal as a working tool. The social issues found in this study might not have been so unanimous if the study had included a more diverse sample, with regards to nationality.

The importance of CSR

All the informants seemed to have an awareness and interest for CSR; however, the degree in how aware and interested they were differed significantly among the informants. Nevertheless, they all seem to agree that organizations should be socially responsible in one-way or another. In other words that organizations contribute to help others than just themselves.

Based on the informant's responses it seemed that organizations neglecting to be socially responsible are perceived as greedy and selfish by the consumers. The majority of the informants indicated that if made aware that an organization has no CSR focus or worse, it has acted socially irresponsible, it would have a negative effect on their attitudes towards this organization. One of the informants became so disappointed over Coca Cola that she

completely boycotted them by stop drinking the product. This supports Trudel and Cotte's (2009) notion that consumers have a "breaking point". However, what triggers this breaking point differs, depending on several aspects such as own perceptions, values, interests etc.

This "breaking point" also seemed to be tied to how dependent the informants were to a product or service. Although a majority of them claimed they would punish socially irresponsible organizations, they also report that it was hard to punish an organization if there were no real substitutes available. One of the informants replied that she is so dependent on the product Mac that she would disregard a lot before going over to competing brands, regardless of these having similar functions as a Mac has.

It seems as though some of the informants made excuses for certain organizations, "closing their eyes" to what they do not want to see. Never the less, the informants only reported a few organizations that they would tolerate "bad behavior from", indicating that consumers can easily switch products and services if given a good reason. This supports Webb et al. (2008) notion that if consumers are dissatisfied with something, they do not hesitate to do something about it.

CSR initiatives can contribute to build character, something that many organizations strive to accomplish (Moloney, 2006). Therefore, overlooking CSR initiatives may lead to less success for an organization than if they have CSR initiatives. According to Moloney, (2006) implementing CSR initiatives into the organization help to increase its image and reputation. The findings in this study indicate that all the informants were attracted to organizations with strong images and reputations, and they felt that CSR initiatives contribute to strengthen an organization's image, brand and reputation.

All the informants did however express it is not an organization's CSR initiatives that mainly attract them towards an organization. It is first and foremost the corporate abilities (CA) they appreciate; meaning an organization delivers a certain quality at a certain price.

This supports Becker-Olsen & Hill (2006) findings that it is an organization's CA consumers primarily respond to, and not the CSR focus they have.

Although, it would appear that the informants primarily get influenced by an organization's CA, CSR initiatives plays an important part in an organization's image and reputation. It might be looked at as a "rolling ball"; the better an organization's image and reputation is, the more interested consumers might be in trying out their products and services. Therefore it might be the combination of the CSR initiatives and the CA that affect the consumers.

The view that the informants had towards CSR focused organizations did not differ much from the view they have on organizations in general. That image does matter, but it is a combination of several factors that influence their choices.

Personal factors

Values, morals and priorities seemed to be a major influence in how supportive the informants were towards CSR focused organizations; supporting Rowley and Moldoveanu (2003) findings that ethical and social engagements are most often interest-based. The informants, who showed the highest interest in being supportive towards CSR focused organizations, also added that they believed it was the right thing to do. They felt so blessed for their good fortunes by having so much. Therefore they prioritized "to give back" in some way to the society.

The informants reported that they knew buying a product or a service from a CSR focused organization would not make all the difference in the world. Never the less, it would affect someone or something in a positive way, and that seemed to be enough for them. According to informant 7: "If I knew that by buying a box of corn it would contribute to giving a poor family just one extra kroner, than that would be a reason enough for me to buy that box of corn. Every little helps".

Ramasamy et al. (2010) found that a person's religion may be a factor that influences consumers' behavior towards CSR focused organizations. The findings in this study support this, as the informants that regarded themselves as active religious, were also the ones that expressed the highest interest in helping society, indicating that there may be a connection between the two.

Cherrier (2006) argued that the way consumers behaves towards socially responsible organization depends on what they see value in. The majority of informants replied for them to view CSR initiatives positively, they needed to see the importance of the CSR initiatives. The informants that portrayed themselves as animal lovers were also the ones who reported that they would support an organization that had these types of CSR initiatives. Those who were less occupied with animal rights on the other hand also showed less incentive to support these CSR focused organizations. These findings show how personal factors such as interest, values, morals etc can influence people's evaluation and behavior towards CSR focused organizations.

Individuals who engage in ethical and social consumption are according to Green and Peloza (2011) left with one or more of the following: (a) emotional value, (b) social value and (c) functional value.

The findings indicate that emotional value in a combination with functional value is what most of the informants were left with when supporting a socially responsible organization. Not only do they achieve a good feeling by helping a cause, but simultaneously get a practical value. The majority of informants reported they regarded environmentally friendly products such as refill products to have practical value, as they were cheaper to buy and took up less space in the trash. They also reported that organic food and certain food sorts (free-range chickens) have functional value, as this not only helps for instance chickens, but is also regarded to be healthier than other substitutes. Therefore by supporting socially

responsible organizations has a multiple effect.

None of the informants replied that they saw any social value in supporting a CSR focused organization. The reason for this seemed to be the informants did not belong to social circles that value this; hence, this support does not lead to any social acceptance. Moreover it might also be a result of the informants not perceiving their social and ethical support as something others will admire them for.

Auger and Devinney (2007) argue that consumers may be willing to pay more for products and services that come from socially responsible organizations. The majority of informants reported they could pay more for products and services containing CSR attributes, but not much more. My expectations were that the informants would show a higher willingness to pay more for goods with socially responsible attribute, but based on the findings of this study, a person's economical situation is not necessarily a determining factor in their social consumption. It is safe to presume that people will be highly price conscious when they barely have enough money to make it through the month. However, regardless of the majority of informants being in full time jobs and not reporting that they had any financial difficulties, most of them seemed to be very price conscious. Surprisingly, the informant who was a student, and presumably had least funds of all the informants, showed a higher willingness to pay more for products and services containing CSR attributes. Knowing who values the CSR initiative is not as easy as it might seem. A person's own values and interests have an important role in the way consumers behave towards CSR focused organizations.

All the informants indirectly referred to *fit*, as they all mentioned CSR initiatives that seemed to match their own interests. Those who own or had owned pets also showed higher concern for animal rights compared to those without owning or having owned animals. In addition, those who support certain causes (for instance cancer causes) reported they would appreciate it if organizations support this as well. The findings suggest that for the consumers

to regard organizations CSR initiatives positively, they need to be able to relate to the chosen causes. A “personal fit” will have a positive effect on the way consumers respond towards organizations CSR initiatives (Schmeltz, 2012).

The informants also reported that for them to regard the organizations CSR initiatives in a good way, these initiatives should match the organizations profile and image. It seemed as the better these corresponded with each other; the better the consumers reacted towards the organization.

In addition to being a fit between an organization’s image and CSR initiatives, the informants indicated the importance of consistency between organizations corporate activities (economical and legal responsibilities) and the implemented CSR initiatives. If they stand for animal rights, but have actions that contradict these socially responsible initiatives, such as using items in their production where animals have suffered, it would have negative consequences. The consequences would be in form of the consumers losing trust and admiration for organizations they believe misrepresent them. All the informants seemed to agree on the fact that it would be more acceptable to see organizations with no CSR initiatives at all, than portrayed as socially responsible and acting inconsistently with their values.

Uusitalo and Oksanen (2004) argue that organizations should focus on one or two main causes; making it easier for consumers to know what an organization stands for. The findings in this study support Uusitalo and Oksanen (2004) that consumers respond well to organizations with one clear cause that they support. All the informants mentioned the Body Shop and Fair Trade as highly socially responsible organizations, and had a clear understanding of what they stand for.

Motives and challenges

Barone et al. (2007) stated that if an organization only applies CSR actions with the sole purpose to benefit itself, it would most likely backfire, resulting in several possible

disadvantages.

The findings in this study indicate that the majority of the consumers do not regard an organization's motivation for being socially responsible to be of significance. It seemed to make little difference whether an organization acts socially responsible with the aim to attract stakeholders; increase revenue; strengthen their image and identity, just to be kind etc. The informants' answers suggest that they see CSR initiatives to be a positive action, regardless of the reason why it is being done. Many of the informants looked at it as a win-win situation for both the organizations and the customers, where both parties benefit of the initiatives. However, they seemed to be much more occupied with the consistency between what the organizations say they will do and what they in fact do.

These findings seem to support Forehand and Grier's (2003) notion that consumers do not necessarily react to the motivation behind organizations CSR initiatives, but rather the consistency between what the organization states that they are going to do, and their actions. As long as someone or something gets benefitted seemed to be the key issue that occupied the majority of informants. If this being inconsistent, that an organization states one thing but does something else, it would have a negative impact in their evaluation and behavior towards the organization.

The fact that the informants were not as occupied with the motivation of the organizations have for being socially responsible, may have to do with them supporting CSR focused organizations for their own benefit, supporting them to ease their own conscience. It seemed as the informants had a bit of a guilty conscience by the fact that they know they have more while others have less. According to informant 10: "If I can help "to give back" in some small way as a good cause, I would gladly do so, as long as it is not too time and energy consuming".

In addition to the informants indicating they have a bit of a bad conscience over

having so much, it could seem as though they felt they “owe” the environment to be socially responsible in some way. The majority of the informants conveyed that we live in a society where not only the organizations pollute and destroy nature; but the consumers also contribute. The consumption rate is high, resulting in waste and garbage that ends up in nature. In addition, consumers are also traveling more than ever, and this has contributed to creating a billion-dollar traveling industry (Cohen & Higham, 2011).

It appears to be similarities between what Cohen & Higham (2011) found in their study and the findings in this thesis. The informants seemed to be aware that the choices they make in the every day life affect the society in some way. However, they were quick to justify why they did something, for instance travel by flight for vacations, and hastily started to defend that this should be accepted, as they buy a carbon quote, buying fair trade, supporting animal rights etc.

It could seem that all the other good things they do throughout the year give them a clearer conscience; allowing them to justify their actions (for example flying and not using public transportation to work etc). Being able to “buy themselves” out of feeling guilty seemed to be appealing for many, especially if they could do this without going through too much trouble. For instance, by choosing a product or a service from CSR focused organizations over a similar one (as long as the price and quality match) seem to be an easy way of helping easing this guilt, as the product or the service was something they would purchase anyway.

Awareness about CSR initiatives

According to Sen et al. (2006) individuals who are aware about an organization’s CSR initiatives, show a higher intention to engage in that organization compared to individuals with no awareness about the CSR initiatives.

The majority of the informants reported they could be more supportive towards CSR focused organizations than what they are today. They buy from well-known organizations such as Fair Trade, The Body Shop etc, but they do not engage in too many other organizations because they have high CSR focus. It seemed as the informants felt somewhat embarrassed about not knowing too much about organizations CSR initiatives; this was something they “should” be more interested in. The informants indicated that by not being very involved in what organizations are doing with the field CSR, it said something about them as individuals.

Informant 10 reported: “I feel that it gives the impression of me being a “less caring” person.” They were however all quick to highlight that their low engagement with CSR focused organizations was not purely a result of them being uninterested in the socially responsible initiatives that organizations have. It was more a result of them not having enough awareness about the CSR initiatives that organizations have. This low awareness may therefore be an outcome of organizations not communicating their CSR initiatives well enough to the consumers.

With improved sufficient information about the organizations CSR initiatives, the informants may be more willing to choose the CSR focused organization over a competitor with less focus on CSR. However, this requires that the products or services is easily available, within a fair price range and contain equal quality as competing brands.

It seems as the informants felt that organizations could do a better job to enlighten them about their CSR initiatives. However, the line between a little communication and too much communication is very thin (Elving & van Vuuren, 2010), and this is believed to create a big challenge for organizations (Porter & Kramer 2004). Several of the informants reported that they wished they would know more about what organizations do in terms of being socially responsible. Still, the same individuals also reported that too much communication is

not appreciated, as organizations that focus too much of showing their “kindness and goodness” will result in the informants getting tired of the information.

Organizations that glorify themselves too much seems to be highly disliked by the informants. They all reported at several occasions that there was nothing worse than someone gloating over how good they are. If a friend or a colleague kept mentioning how much of good deeds he or she did, it would not be well received by others. The same goes for organizations. Consumers encourage their CSR initiatives, and want to be informed about what the organizations do, just not retold over and over again.

The majority of the informants indirectly reported that organizations should focus on having a two-way communication with the consumers. This would make people involved in a different way. One of the informants replied:

“I like it when I can get involved in things; that my voice is heard. Organizations that create Facebook pages etc, must create a lot more awareness around themselves than those who only show their CSR initiatives in an annual report.”

The fact that the informants seem to respond positively to being personally involved in organizations CSR initiatives supports Grunig and Hunt’s (1984) public relations theory.

There seemed to be contradicting views on what the informants regarded as credible sources when it came to learning about CSR initiatives. About half of them viewed the information the organizations publish (advertisement and homepages) to be highly credible. Others found the media and a third part to be the most credible source. The informant’s views on what was perceived to be credible sources seemed to be influence by how critical and skeptical they were to things in general.

The majority of the informants did not really have any specific preferences on whether an organization should communicate their CSR statement in an explicit or an implicit way. They did however mention that if organizations chose to have an explicit statement, they

would risk having a higher fall if they make a mistake since the consumers may have higher expectations towards them, compared to the organizations that are more careful to announce their promises.

The majority of informants indicated that it might be smarter for organizations to have an implicit statement, but rather report explicit results. This way the organizations inform people about what they stand for and the visions that they have, but at the same time do not get caught in a corner of promising something they could not keep. These findings support Wagner et al. (2009) notion that it is the inconsistency between what is publically stated and actually done that affects consumers the highest.

Advantages and disadvantages

All the informants reported that they saw the use of CSR to be an advantage both for the society (improvement), but at the same time organizations increase their image and reputation, attract more stakeholders, increase their financial situation etc. Informant 9 said:

“Organizations will spend money on advertising themselves no matter what. So it is genius that some good cause can get benefitted at the same time as the organization’s image improves, instead of spending 20.000 kroner on adverts and other things like that.”

The majority of the informants regarded implementing CSR initiatives as a win-win situation.

When the informants were asked if they saw any disadvantages with the usage of CSR, the majority of them replied that there might be higher costs associated with being socially responsible. Other than this, they saw no particular disadvantages with it. My expectations were that the informants would see at least a couple more disadvantages with the use of CSR. For instance that big oil companies such as Statoil and BP donates to environmental causes, but at the same time, they may also be a main contribute to creating the environmental problems in the first place. Whether they are benefitting the society or

worsening it is a relevant question. These thoughts were however not brought up by any of the informants, indicating that the consumers do not really associate many disadvantages with the use of CSR.

Conclusion

This research study has looked at what consumers experience as important in their evaluation of and behavior towards CSR focused organizations. In addition the study looked at whether the consumers reflect over possible disadvantages associated with CSR usage.

The findings indicate that people expect organizations to be socially responsible in one way or another. Those organizations that neglect being socially responsible, may risk being perceived negatively by the consumers. It was also found that consumers experience several aspects to affect the way they act and respond towards CSR focused organizations. A main aspect all the informants reported to be of importance was the consistency between what organizations claim to do, and in fact do with regards to CSR. Other than this, personal values, culture, interests and financial situation play a significant part.

Lack of communication was for many of the informants a reason why they had limited knowledge about organizations CSR initiatives. The informants requested more information from organizations about this, but at the same time they all emphasized to find a balance; too much information would create a negative effect. If it was performed in a tasteful and discreet matter, it could help to improve an organization's image and reputation.

Although image and reputation were appealing factors for the informants with regards to whether they choose to consume from an organization, there were several aspects that affected their decision. Those aspects were the necessity of buying the product or the service, able to afford it, easily accessible and that the product or the service met the customers expectations in terms of standards and quality.

The findings indicate that CSR initiatives alone cannot keep an organization running.

If an organization already provides good CA, implementing CSR initiatives may give them an advantage over similar organizations, as it seems that consumers respond positively to those organizations that try to do good for others than themselves. Only one disadvantage was mentioned, and that was the cost aspect. However, this was not reported to be a barrier for consumers to engage in socially responsible organizations.

The effects that CSR initiatives have on the consumers seem mostly positive, indicating that organizations have more to achieve on being socially responsible than by not implementing it. However, for CSR initiatives to have a desired effect on the consumers, there needs to be a fit between the organization's own image and values and the CSR initiatives, as well as there needs to be a fit between the CSR initiatives and what their main segments value and appreciate.

Further research

This study was based on a small sample of informants, all with the same culture and currently living in Stavanger. For future research, it would be interesting to expand this scope by including informants representing different cultures and/or nationalities. It could also be performed a quantitative study in order to investigate if the factors that are found in the present study also apply for larger groups.

These recommendations for future studies are seen as relevant and beneficial for organizations to further investigate if their CSR initiatives have a positive effect on the consumers. For further expansion of the scope would be to include other stakeholders, especially the employees. It might for instance be of interest to investigate if there is a correlation between organizational commitment and the CSR initiatives implemented.

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Appendix A Interview guide (English)

Interview Guide

Personal information:

Age:

Gender:

Nationality:

Work title:

Religion

General questions regarding consuming

- What usually determines your overall purchases ?
- Do you often consume based on routine and habit?
- If you like trying new products and services, what usually attracts you to these?
- How often do you reflect over the organizations that you buy from?
- Could you buy something mainly because you like/admire the organization who offers it, and if so, what would these things typically be?

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

- What do you associate with Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)
- In your opinion, does CSR actions strengthen a company's brand, and why?
- Could you mention any specific positive or negative consequences with the usage of CSR, and if so, what would that be?
- Would you say that organizations that focus highly on CSR will strengthen its reputation, and if so why?
- Have you ever bought from a organization, primarily because they focus highly on CSR?
- Can you mention 3 organizations that you associate with having high CSR focus?

The organizations motivation

- Why do you believe that organizations focus on CSR?
- Does the motivation that organizations have for being socially responsible influence your evaluation of and behavior towards them, and if so why?

Influence and communication

- What is the most credible information source when learning about organizations CSR initiatives?
- What is the least credible information source?
- How do you prefer an organization to communicate their CSR dedication, implicit or explicit?
- How much should an organization communicate its CSR focus to the public?

Personal factors

- Can you mention 2 reasons why you would consume from a socially responsible organization?
- Have you ever supported a socially responsible organization to better your conscience? And if so, when?
- How does your financial situation influence your support to CSR focused organizations?

Rewarding and punishing CSR focused organizations

- If an organization with high CSR focus encounters a crisis, would you have goodwill towards it, and “look away” from the incident.
- Would you pay more for a product or service that contains CSR attributes?
- Have you ever punished organizations with high CSR focus? If so, why?
- If you were to purchase a product or service that contained CSR attributes, what would determining factors that affect that decision?

Appendix B Interview guide (Norwegian)

Intervju guide

Personlig informasjon

Alder:

Kjønn:

Nasjonalitet:

Arbeid tittel:

Religion:

Generelle spørsmål om å konsumere

- Hva bestemmer vanligvis dine generelle?
- Handler du mest basert på rutine og vane, eller liker å prøve nye merker, tjenester osv.
- Hvis du liker å prøve nye produkter og tjenester, hva tiltrekker deg til disse?
- Hvor ofte reflekterer du over selskapet som produserer det du handler?
- Kunne du kjøpe noe hovedsaklig fordi du liker / beundrer selskapet som tilbyr det, og hvis så, hva ville disse tingene typisk være?

Samfunns ansvarlige selskap

- Hva forbinder du med samfunnsansvar?
- Etter din mening, styrker samfunnsansvarlige handlinger et selskaps merkevare og omdømme, og i så fall hvorfor?
- Kan du nevne spesielle positive eller negative følger for bedrifter som fokuserer på å være samfunnsansvarlige?
- Har du noen gang kjøpt av et selskap, primært fordi de fokuserer sterkt på samfunnsansvar?
- Kan du beskrive en konkret situasjon der du valgte å kjøpe fra en samfunnsansvarlig organisasjon over en annen (med liten eller ingen samfunns ansvar fokus)
- Kan du nevne 3 bedrifter som du forbinder med å ha høyt fokus på samfunnsansvar?

Organisasjonene motivasjon

- Hvorfor tror du at organisasjonene fokuserer på å være samfunnsansvarlige?
- Påvirker den motivasjonen som bedrifter har for å ville være samfunnsansvarlige, din holdning til organisasjonen, og evt. hvorfor?

Innflytelse og kommunikasjon

- Hva er den mest troverdig informasjonskilde når du skal lære om organisasjoners samfunnsansvarlige initiativer?
- Hva er den minst troverdig informasjonskilde?
- Hvordan foretrekker du at en organisasjon kommuniserer sitt samfunnsansvarlige engasjement, implisitt eller eksplisitt?
- Hvor mye bør en organisasjon kommunisere sitt samfunnsansvar fokus til offentligheten?

Personlige faktorer

- Kan du nevne 3 ting du får ut av å handle fra en samfunnsansvarlig organisasjon?
- Har du noen gang støttet en sosialt ansvarlig organisasjon for å bedre din egen samvittighet? Og hvis så, hvilken organisasjon?
- Hvordan påvirker din finansielle situasjonen din støtte til samfunns ansvarlige organisasjonene?

Belønning og straff CSR fokuserte organisasjoner

- Hvis en organisasjon med høyt fokus på samfunns ansvar møter en krise, ville du ha goodwill mot den fordi om, og "se bort" fra hendelsen.
- Vil du betale mer for et produkt eller en tjeneste som inneholder samfunnsansvarlige attributter, og evt. hvor mye mer?
- Har du noen gang straffet organisasjoner for de har lite fokus på samfunnsansvar? Hvis ja, hvorfor?
- Om du skulle valgt å handle et produkt som fremstiltes med samfunnsansvarlige attributter, hva ville påvirker denne avgjørelsen?